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QUESTIONS OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, International Catholic Peace Movement, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 December 1999]

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1. On 8 November 1999, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators started the final talks which have to lead to a definitive status of the Palestinian territories. The deadline for these talks is 13 September 2000, the seventh anniversary of the Oslo Agreements, but both parties hope to reach a preliminary agreement by February 2000.

2. One of the difficult aspects of the talks is the status of the city of Jerusalem. In 1967, Israel occupied the Arab eastern part of Jerusalem, together with the rest of the West Bank of Jordan River. For Israel, united Jerusalem is the eternal city and it claims jurisdiction over the whole city. The Palestinians want to have the eastern part of the city as the capital of the Palestinian State. The international community and Pax Christi International do not accept the claims of Israel over Jerusalem. We would like to urge the United Nations Commission for Human Rights to support the parties involved in the process in finding a compromise and to take the following aspects into consideration.

3. The future of Jerusalem depends on its two dimensions, religious and political. On the political level, two nationalities, Israeli and Palestinian, are present and have political rights in the city. On the religious level, three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have religious rights, and require both political entities to guarantee religious freedom for all believers, local and universal. Exclusivism from any side, political or religious, will harm the identity of the city and the harmony among all those who are concerned, all its sons and daughters. Jerusalem cannot be solely Israeli or merely Palestinian, neither can it be solely Muslim or Christian or Jewish. It should be shared by all.

4. Throughout its past history, Jerusalem was in the hands of a single political power corresponding to or supported by one religion. Therefore,it was always a source of war. Exclusivism nourishes wars and hostility today and tomorrow, as in the past. To reach a position of stable peace, each one of its children, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims, should feel at home and should enjoy the same freedom and the same rights and duties. No one should feel himself a guest or a stranger in his own city.

5. Given the five essential components of the living Jerusalem, two nationalities and three religions, does that mean that Jerusalem must be divided again? At present Jerusalem, despite its political unification, is divided into two populations, Jewish and Palestinian, still deeply separated by the conflict that is visible in the facts and in the hearts of both. The question to be asked now is rather: how to reunify the city? The answer: by recognizing the separate rights of all; even divided politically, it will be reunified. The Israeli part will be Israeli and a capital for Israel; the Palestinian part will be Palestinian and a capital for Palestine. And the part containing holy places should have a special arrangement, agreed upon by the two political parties and the three religions. Divide Jerusalem in order to reunify it: this is what is needed now, in order to achieve peace and reconciliation among its two peoples and three religions.

6. Therefore, Jerusalem requires a special status, given its pluralistic and religious importance. The guiding principle in this elaboration is the following: to give Jerusalem a definitive stability, so that it will never again become a source of war between peoples and religions. For that, the five components of the city (three religions and two peoples) must be taken into consideration and given satisfaction, and due respect guaranteed to national or religious differences.

7. Because of the universal significance of Jerusalem, the international community, including the Commission on Human Rights, ought to be engaged in securing the stability and permanence of this status. Jerusalem is too precious to be dependent solely on municipal or national political authorities, whoever they may be. Experience shows that an international guarantee is necessary. Therefore, it needs a unique status which will distinguish it from all the other cities of the world and put it above all problems of security. This special local status given to Jerusalem should have the support and the guarantees of the international community.

8. Ways should be found so that Jerusalem remains open to all without any exception. The security system should adapt to that priority; Jerusalem is first of all a spiritual capital for the three religions, not only for believers coming from all over the world, but also for those believers who are Palestinians and live near Jerusalem.

9. Religion cannot be an agent of war. True religion is an invitation to reconciliation, mutual respect and love. This endeavour to recognize and accept the other should lead all believers of the three faiths to a common ideal of holiness. It is only on that deep level of holiness that the unity of the city can be built. This religious endeavour towards the essence of religion, which is holiness in men's relationship with God and with one another, should inspire all the political measures taken by all the political leaders in Jerusalem.

10. In continuously striving for a peaceful transition in which the rights of all the peoples in the region can be respected, Pax Christi International hopes that the political leaders will be able to take the difficult decisions needed. We are, of course, pleased that final talks between Israelis and Palestinians are taking place. Pax Christi International offers to all leaders involved in this process its support in seizing this critical opportunity to bring a definitive and just peace to the area. The peoples of the region have been searching for such a peace for long time.